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THOUGHTS ON THE INTELLECT  
IN GENERAL AND IN EVERY RELATION.

Translated from the German of ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER by CHARLES JOSEPHÉ, M.D.

(Chapter III. of the "Parerga and Paralipomena.")

§ 31. What light is for the external world of bodies, the intellect is for the inner world of consciousness. For this is to the will (therefore also to the organism, which is only the will objectively conceived) about as light is to combustible bodies and oxygen, at whose union it breaks out. And as this is so much the purer the less it mixes itself with the smoke of the burning body, so also the intellect is the purer the more perfectly it is separated from the will from which it arose. In a bolder metaphor, it even could be said: life is, as everybody knows, a process of combustion; the formation of light taking place in it is the intellect.

§ 32. That our recognition, like our eye, only looks without, and not within, so that, if the recognizing tries to direct itself within so as to recognize itself, it looks into a perfect darkness, gets into a perfect vacuity,—this depends upon the following two reasons:

(1.) The subject of cognition is not something self-subsisting, no thing in itself; it has no independent, original, substantial existence; but it is a mere apparition, something secondary, an accident at first conditioned by the organism which is the apparition of the will; it is, in short, nothing else than the focus in which all powers of the brain converge. Now, how should this subject of cognition recognize itself, as it in itself is nothing? It directs itself within; then, of course, it recognizes the will, which is the basis of its essence: but this is, after all, for the recognizing subject no proper self-cognition, but cognition of something else different from it, but which now, already as something recognized directly, is only phenomenon, but such a one as has time only for its form—not, like the things of the external world, space besides. But, aside from this, the subject also only recognizes the will, like external things, in its utterance, that is, in the single acts of will and other affections, which are comprehended under the

name of wishes, affections, passions, and feelings: consequently it recognizes it always as phenomenon, although not under the restriction of space, like external things. But, for the above-mentioned reason, the recognizing subject cannot recognize itself simply because there is nothing to be recognized in it except this, that it is the recognizing, and just for that reason never that which is recognized. It is a phenomenon which has no other expression but to recognize; consequently no other can be recognized in it.

(2.) The will in us is of course a thing in itself, existing for itself, something primary, self-subsisting, that whose manifestation represents itself as organism in the spatially intuiting apprehension of the brain. But still it is not capable of a self-cognition, because it is in and for itself only something that wills, but does not recognize; for the will as such does not recognize anything at all, consequently not itself. The recognizing is a secondary and mediated function which does not belong to it, the primary in its own nature.

§ 33. The most simple, unprejudiced self-observation, together with anatomical researches, leads to the conclusion that the intellect, as well as its objectivation, the brain, together with the apparatus of senses attached to it, is nothing but a highly increased susceptibility for influences from without, but that it does not constitute our original and real inner nature; thus, that the intellect within us is not what in the plant is the impelling power, or in the stone gravity, or chemical forces: only the will shows itself as this. But the intellect within us is that which in the plant is mere susceptibility to external influences, to physical and chemical influences, and whatever else may increase or hinder their growing and thriving; only that within us this susceptibility is so very highly increased, that, by virtue of it, the whole objective world—the world as conception—presents itself, consequently takes thus its origin as object. To make this clear, one may imagine the world to be without animal beings. Thus it is without any perception, consequently objectively does not exist at all; nevertheless we take it to exist thus. Now, let us imagine a number of plants sprung up from the soil closely side by side. Many things will influence them, as light, air, the contact of one

plant with another, moisture, cold, warmth, electric tension, etc. Now let us increase, in thought, the susceptibility of these plants to such influences more and more: then at last this will become sensation, accompanied by the ability to refer it to its causes, and thus results perception: directly there is the world presenting itself in space, time, and causality, but it remains none the less a mere result of the external influences upon the susceptibility of plants. This allegorical contemplation is very well adapted to make intelligible the mere phenomenal existence of the external world. For who would think after this of maintaining that the circumstances which have their existence in such a contemplation, arising from mere relations between external influences and living susceptibility,—who would think that they represent the truly objective inner and original nature of all those potencies of Nature which, as is admitted, influence all the plants, that is, the world of things, in themselves? We therefore can by this picture make it intelligible to us, why the human intellect has such narrow limits, as Kant points out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

But the thing in itself, on the contrary, is the will alone; consequently it is the creator and bearer of all properties of the phenomenon. Without hesitation it is charged with the moral; but also the cognition and its power, that is, the intellect, belongs to its appearance, consequently mediately to it itself. That narrow-minded and stupid men always experience some contempt may, at least partly, depend upon this, that the will has made the burden so easy, and, for the furtherance of its aims, has assumed only two drams of the cognitive faculty.

§ 34. Not only, as I have said above (§ 25), and also already in my principal work (vol. i. § 14), is all evidence intuitive, but all true and real understanding is so too. This is proved by the innumerable tropes in all languages, which are all efforts to reduce what is abstract to something visible. For mere abstract notions of a thing give no real understanding of the same, although they enable us to speak of it as many people talk of many things: yea, many need for this purpose not even notions, but only words; for instance, technical expressions, which they have learned, suffice

them. But, on the contrary, to understand really and truly, it is required that one conceive intuitively; that he receive a clear image, if possible, from the reality itself, but at least from the imagination. Even that which is too large or too complicated to be surveyed at a glance, must, to be really understood, be either visibly represented, or represented by something that can be surveyed; but that which does not admit of this, one must at least try to represent under some intuitive visible picture and allegory. So far intuition is the basis of our recognition. This is also shown by this, that we indeed can think *in abstracto* very large numbers, and also very great distances, which can be expressed only by such as, for instance, the astronomical ones; but that still we do not really and immediately understand them, but have only a notion of their proportion.

The philosopher should, more than any one else, gather from that original source the intuitive cognition, and therefore constantly fix his eyes on things themselves, on Nature, the world, and life; take them, and not books, for the text of his thoughts, and also constantly examine and control all notions that pass, already prepared, over to him; and take books, therefore, not as sources of cognition, but only as an assistance. For what they give he only receives at second hand, and generally also somewhat distorted—perchance only a reflection, a likeness of the original (that is, the world), and rarely is the looking-glass perfectly clear. But Nature, the reality, on the contrary, never lies; for it is she who makes all truth to be truth. The philosopher, therefore, has to make his study of her, and it is principally her great and distinct features, her chief and fundamental characteristics, whence his problem arises. He therefore will take as the object of his consideration the principal and general phenomena, those which are everywhere and at all times; but the special, particular, rare, microscopic, or passing phenomena, he will leave to the natural philosopher, to the zoologist, the historian, etc. More important things occupy him: the totality and the greatness of the world, its essential part, the fundamental truths, they are his aim. He therefore cannot at the same time occupy himself with its particularities and *minutiæ* just as he who, from the top of a high mountain, looks

over the land, cannot at the same time ascertain and examine the plants growing down in the valley, but leaves this to him who botanizes among them. To devote oneself and all one's faculties to a special science, one must of course like it very much, but must also have a great indifference towards all others; for the former is only possible under the condition of remaining ignorant in all others, just as he who marries one renounces all others. Spirits of the first rank will therefore never devote themselves to a special science; for the understanding of the whole lies too much at their heart. They are generals, not captains; leaders of an orchestra, not individual performers. How should a great spirit find its satisfaction in knowing perfectly, and in all its relations to others, one field, one certain branch of the community of things, and in leaving out of sight everything else? It, on the contrary, is directed to the whole; its aim is the whole of things, the world in general, and there must nothing remain unknown to him: he consequently cannot spend his life in exhausting the minutiae of a single department.

§ 35. That the lowest of all mental operations is the arithmetical is proved by this, that this is the only one which may also be performed by a machine, as there are now in England already such calculating machines in frequent use. Now, in truth, all analysis, *finitorum et infinitorum*, traces back to counting. After this, one will understand the mathematical penetration of the mind at which Lichtenberg makes himself merry in saying: "With mathematics it is almost as with theology. Just as those following the last, especially if they fill an office, lay claim to a special credit for holiness and a nearer relationship to God, although very many amongst them are nothing but idle rogues, so the so-called mathematicians very often wish to be taken for deep thinkers, although there are amongst them the greatest blunderheads that ever can be found, unfit for any business which requires reflection, if it cannot be done by means of that easy connection of signs which are more the work of routine than of thinking.\*

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\* Every understanding is an immediate one, and therefore an intuitive apprehension of the causal connection, although it must readily become changed into abstract notions so as to become established. Calculation is consequently no

§ 36. The eye becomes weak from long straining at one object, and does not see any more; in the same way the intellect becomes unable, by continually meditating over the same things, to find out and to comprehend more of them; it becomes weak and embarrassed. It is necessary to quit them, so as to return to them again, when we shall find them again fresh and with clear outlines. Therefore, when Plato relates in his Banquet that Socrates was standing motionless and like a statue for twenty-four hours meditating over something he remembered, we must not only say to this—*non è vero*; but also add to it, *e mal trovato*. From this want of rest of the intellect is also explained this, that if we, after any longer pause, look as it were anew into the common course of the things of this world, and thus cast a fresh, really wholly unprejudiced glance at them, their connection and their significance become most pure and most deeply clear to us, in such a way, that then we see quite plainly things, and only cannot understand how it is possible that they are not perceived by all those who constantly move amongst them. Such a clear moment, therefore, can be compared with a lucid interval.

§ 37. In a higher sense, even the hours of inspiration, with their moments of enlightening and proper conception, are nothing but the lucid intervals of genius. It therefore could be said that genius lodges only one story higher than madness. Even the reason of the reasonable operates only in lucid intervals, for he also is not always reasonable. Also the prudent man is not always thus; for sometimes he will

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understanding of things. This only can be obtained in the way of intuition through correct cognition of the causality and geometrical construction of the process, as Euler gave such better than anybody else because he understood the things from the foundation. Calculation, on the contrary, has to deal with nothing but abstract notions of quantity, the relation of which to each other it fixes. By these means not the least understanding of a physical event can be obtained. For to understand such a one it requires intuitive visible comprehension of the spatial relations by means of which the causes operate. Calculation defines the *how much* and *how large*, and is therefore indispensable in practice. It even can be said: where calculation begins, understanding ends. For the head, occupied with numbers while calculating, alienated from the causal connection and the geometrical construction of the physical event, is full of mere abstract notions of numbers. But the result never tells more than *how much*, never *what*.

not be able to recall himself and to collect things most familiar to him. All this seems to paint a certain ebb and flood of the fluids of the brain, or an extension or relaxation of its fibres. Now if, at a spring-tide of this kind, some new and deep intelligence rises suddenly before us, whereby of course our thoughts attain a very high degree of vivacity, then the motive to this will always be an intuitive visible one, and an intuitive understanding always lies at the foundation of every great thought. For words awaken thoughts in others, pictures in us.

§ 38. It is understood by itself that one should write down as soon as possible valuable original meditations; for we forget sometimes what we have experienced, and much more that which we have thought. And thoughts do not come when *we* wish, but when *they* wish to come. On the contrary, whatever we receive finished from without, that which we merely have learned, it is better not to write down, therefore to make no collections; for to write down something means to consign it to oblivion. But one should treat his *mémoire* vigorously and despotically, so that it may not forget obedience; for instance, if one cannot recall to his mind anything, a verse, or word, he should on no account look for it in books, but should for weeks systematically torment his memory with it until it has done its duty. For the longer one has to think of it, the better will it stick afterwards. What one thus with great exertion has worked out from the depths of his memory, will at some other time be much readier at one's command than if one had renewed it again by means of books. Mnemonics, on the contrary, rests on this as a foundation, that one trusts more to his wit than to his memory, and therefore transfers the services of this to the former. He must substitute for something that is hard something that is easy to remember, and translate it afterwards again into the former. This mnemonics is to the natural memory what an artificial leg is to a real one, and is, like everything, subject to the expression of Napoleon: *tout ce qui n'est pas naturel est imparfait*. It is convenient to make use of it at the beginning with things newly learned, or words, like a temporary crutch, until they are incorporated into the natural, immediate memory. How our memory sets about to find

each time, out of the often immeasurable compass of its stock, just what is wanting—how the sometimes long, blind search after it goes on—how the, at first, vainly looked for comes to us generally whenever we have discovered a little thread attached to it, but at other times after hours, sometimes after days, quite of itself, without any motive, as if it were whispered to us,—all this is to us ourselves, who are active in it, a riddle; but it seems to me indisputable that those subtle and mysterious operations, on such an enormous quantity and variety of the matter to be remembered, can by no means be replaced by an artificial and conscious play with analogies, with which the natural memory, after all, always must remain as the *primum mobile*, but now has to keep in memory even two instead of one, the sign and the thing signified. At all events, such an artificial memory can take only a proportionally very small stock. Altogether, there are two modes in which things become impressed on our memory: either through intention, as we intentionally memorize them, whereby we meanwhile can also make use of mnemonic arts, if they are only numbers or words; or they impress themselves, without our assistance, by themselves, by virtue of the impression they make upon us, for which reason we may also call them lasting ones. But just as we generally do not feel a wound at the moment we receive it, but only afterwards, so also many a thought makes a deeper impression upon us than we are directly conscious of, for afterwards we remember it again; the consequence of which is that we do not forget it, but it becomes incorporated in the system of our thought, to step forward in the right hour. To this is plainly requisite that, in some relation or other, it interest us. It therefore is required that one have a lively spirit, which eagerly takes up the objective, and aspires after knowledge and understanding. The surprising ignorance of many scholars, in things of their own department, has as its ultimate reason their want of interest for the objects of the same; consequently the observations, remarks, inspections, etc., make no vivid impression upon them, and therefore do not cling to them, as they in general do not study *con amore*, but under self-constraint: the more things there are a man takes a vivid and objective

interest in, the more will fix itself in this spontaneous mode in his memory; therefore also mostly in the youth, where the novelty of things heightens interest in them. This second mode is much surer than the first, and selects besides, quite of itself, what is most essential for us, although it will with stupid heads confine itself to personal affairs.

§ 39. The quality of our thoughts (their formal value) comes from within, but their *direction*, and through this their material, from without; so that what we think in any given moment is the product of two fundamentally different factors. The objects are therefore for the spirit only that which the plectron is for the lyre; consequently the great diversity of thoughts which the same aspect excites in different heads. When I still stood in the flower of my spirit and in the point of culmination of its powers where the brain had its highest tension, then whatever object my eye could meet talked revelations to me, and a series of thoughts arose which were worthy to be written down, and accordingly were. But in the progress of life, especially in the years of failing powers, those hours became less and less frequent; for the objects are, it is true, the plectron, but the lyre is the spirit. Whether this be well and highly tuned—that is what makes the great difference in the world's representation of itself in every head. Now as this depends upon physiological and anatomical conditions, thus, on the other side, Chance, in bringing forward the objects which shall occupy us, keeps the plectron in its hand. Nevertheless, here a great part of the matter is placed in our caprice, in so far as we, at least partly, can design it by means of the objects with which we occupy or surround ourselves. Upon this we therefore should devote some care, and proceed with methodical intention.

The excellent little book of Locke *On the Conduct of the Understanding* gives us instruction on this point. Good, serious thoughts on worthy objects, however, cannot be called up arbitrarily at any time: all that we can do is to keep the road open for them by scaring away all futile, insipid or common-place ruminations, and by averting all tricks and farces. It therefore can be said, that, to think something judicious, the first means is to think nothing absurd. Leave

the plain free only to good thoughts: they will come. For the same reason, one should not in every moment in which he is not occupied directly take a book in hand, but he should get settled in his head; then easily something good might rise in it. Very judicious is the observation Riemer made in his book on Goethe, that original thoughts almost only come while walking or standing, hardly ever in sitting. Now, because generally the rising of vivid, impressive, worthy thoughts is more the consequence of inner than of outer conditions, it becomes explicable from this, that of such thoughts several, regarding quite different objects, will appear quickly one after another, and often at the same time, in which case they cross and interfere with each other like crystals,—even that may happen to us which happened to him who hunted two hares at the same time.

§ 40. How narrow and poor the normal human intellect is, and how small the clearness of consciousness is, may be judged from this, that, in spite of the ephemeral shortness of the life of man cast into an endless time, of the uncertainty of our existence, of the innumerable riddles urging themselves everywhere, the important character of so many phenomena, and the thorough insufficiency of life—yet all are not constantly and unremittingly philosophizing—nay, not even many, or even only some, only few; no, only one now and then, only the rare exceptions. The rest live on in this dream not much different from the animals, from which after all they only distinguish themselves through foresight for several years in advance. For the metaphysical want which perhaps could announce itself has been taken care of from above in advance by means of religions; and these, no matter how they may be, do suffice. However, it may be that secretly there is more philosophizing than is apparent. For, truly, a dubious situation is ours!—to live a span of time, full of trouble, misery, anguish, and pain, without knowing in the least *wherfrom*, *whereto*, and *what for*; and to have, in addition to all this, the priests, of all colors, with their respective revelations on the matter, together with their threatenings against infidels.

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